

ASSEMBLY SELECT COMMITTEE ON YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION

ASSEMBLY MEMBER ANNA M. CABALLERO, CHAIR

UPDATE OF THE COMMITTEE'S WORK IN 2007

MARCH 2008

SUMMARY

The Assembly Select Committee on Youth Violence Prevention was formed in February, 2007, to respond to California's growing crisis of gang violence. The mission of the committee is to study youth violence from a public and community health perspective and develop strategies to help local communities. The committee plans to produce a youth violence prevention 'tool-kit' that will both aid the Legislature and the Administration in identifying legislative and budget changes to support the work of communities seeking solutions to youth violence; and provide information to communities about approaches that have been effective in reducing youth violence.

In 2007, the committee held five hearings¹ in furtherance of this goal. These were:

MAY 4, LOS ANGELES: DEVELOPING A COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF YOUTH VIOLENCE. The purpose of this hearing was to provide committee members with a common, foundational understanding of the causes of youth violence. Testimony was provided by prominent researchers in the field of youth violence prevention and several local community-based organizations (CBOs).

MAY 14, SALINAS AND JUNE 1, OAKLAND: LOCAL PROGRAMS THAT WORK. These hearings provided information about local youth violence prevention and intervention strategies, and programs designed specifically to address the needs of families. Testimony was provided by local law enforcement, education, job and mental health professionals as well as local CBO's.

July 18, Sacramento: Joint Hearing with Select Committee on Foster Care: Foster Youth - Crossover to Juvenile Justice System. This hearing examined the deficiencies in the state and county

¹ Agendas and related materials from the hearings are available on the Select Committee link on Assembly Member Caballero's website (www.democrats.assembly.ca.gov/members/a28).

dependency system currently serving foster youth whose activities have resulted in their becoming involved with the juvenile justice system.

OCTOBER 1, SACRAMENTO: STATE PROGRAMS TO AID LOCAL COMMUNITIES. At this hearing the select committee heard from state officials regarding the state funds available to help local communities. A key witness was Paul Seave, newly appointed Director of the governor's Office of Gang and Youth Violence Policy. Legislators were particularly interested to learn if state agencies acted in a coordinated fashion; and if there were measurement criteria to evaluate program effectiveness.

KEY FINDINGS

LOCAL ISSUES

LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS LACK CONSISTENT FUNDING. Researchers and community representatives agree that early childhood education, after-school programs, literacy programs and career technical education are critical to communities' success in diverting children and young people from gang activities. Ongoing funding for these efforts is difficult to obtain and often falls short of the amounts needed to support a sustained effort in all of these areas.

LACK OF COORDINATION AMONG LOCAL PROGRAMS. Both a "silo" mentality (with agencies failing to integrate their own mission with those of other agencies) and legal constraints often prevent local agencies from achieving the coordination of information and services needed to provide at-risk youth and their families with the wraparound services they need. An effective program requires coordination among law enforcement (DA's, police, probation officers), mental health and social workers and the education community. Additionally, local faith and community organizations need to be involved to provide support and practical assistance to help address a range of issues, from housing to job training to improving literacy skills. Agencies and organizations that are required to protect the confidentiality of clients must develop protocols to ensure that these requirements do not impede the delivery of needed services.

MORE ACCOUNTABILITY NEEDED, AND UNIFORM METRICS TO MEASURE OUTCOMES. Most local communities lack effective means to measure which programs are effective at preventing or reducing youth violence, over a sustained period of time. Often the only measurement is of what did not happen, for example, a reduction in gang-related violence. Communities need better tools to measure and validate the effectiveness of local programs in a uniform, "apples to apples" manner.

STATE ISSUES

NEEDED: A STATEWIDE FRAMEWORK TO ADDRESS YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION. The state has historically lacked a framework and statewide policy on youth violence prevention to guide the distribution of scarce funds, and to provide guidance to state agencies as to the type and quality of local partnership programs that will make a difference.

LITTLE COORDINATION AMONG STATE AGENCIES. Like local agencies, state agencies operate with a “silo” mentality when funding local youth violence prevention, intervention or suppression programs. There is little coordination among agencies, and the efforts are fragmented and disorganized.

LACK OF UNIFORM METRICS IMPEDES EFFECTIVE DISTRIBUTION OF LIMITED STATE FUNDS. State agencies funding various programs have few means to evaluate local programs most effective in preventing youth violence. Agencies that do attempt to measure outcomes may be operating with different metrics than other agencies. Uniform evaluation tools would help to direct scarce state dollars to more effective local programs, and encourage local agencies to undertake similar efforts.

LACK OF STATE POLICIES TO ADDRESS PRISON GANG/STREET GANG INTERSECT. Local street gang members who are incarcerated are housed with more organized, violent prison gang members who recruit and train young members. Prison gang members are often released to their former communities, without prior consultation or information-sharing between state and local law enforcement officials about how the prisoner did in prison, who he was involved with, or services he might need to avoid a reconnection with local gangs. This hampers the ability of local communities to combat and respond to the growing problem of gang-related youth violence.

NEW STATE INITIATIVES COULD HELP LOCAL COMMUNITIES. The creation of a new Office of Gang and Youth Violence Policy and Governor’s new Cal-GRIP² program offers hope that the state may be on the path to developing consistent policies that will guide future state efforts to support local communities. Sustained state support, undertaken in conjunction with better evaluation tools, could be extremely helpful in guiding communities to undertake proven strategies. Unfortunately, the state’s ongoing fiscal crisis means that opportunities for state support of promising local strategies will be severely limited for several years to come. This means that in the immediate future, as in past years, local communities will be largely on their own in their efforts to prevent youth violence. This fact underscores the importance of the mission of this select

² *Gang Reduction, Intervention and Prevention Program*

committee -- identifying a “tool-kit” of effective strategies for communities to undertake. Additionally, the Legislature must carefully monitor the work of the new state initiatives to ensure that scarce state resources are directed at the most effective strategies.

NEXT STEPS FOR THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION

During 2008 the select committee plans to hold three additional hearings in different regions of the state to further fulfill its goal of producing a “tool-kit” of strategies and recommendations that could help the state and local communities prioritize the expenditure of scarce resources. A final report will be produced in the fall of 2008, following the conclusion of the 2007-08 legislative session.